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INFO RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA IMMEDIATE 6690
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RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ MAY 0613
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA IMMEDIATE 3755
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS IMMEDIATE 2570
RUEHZP/AMEMBASSY PANAMA IMMEDIATE 0703
RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL IMMEDIATE 2384
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SUBJECT: NEW COLOMBIAN FOREIGN MINISTER VISITS ECUADOR

REF: QUITO 01180

Classified By: PolOff Jarahn Hillsman, Reasons 1.4 (b&d)

¶1. (U) Summary: Colombian Foreign Minister Fernando Araujo made his first official visit to Ecuador on May 28. During the visit, Araujo stressed the need for continued anti-narcotics cooperation; communicated GOC willingness to compensate border residents for damage caused by aerial fumigations (if proven scientifically); and expressed Colombia's interest in supporting Plan Ecuador initiatives. Espinosa welcomed the GOC position on fumigations, noting it as helpful in moving forward on more pressing bilateral issues. Press coverage of the visit was positive, and the GOC position on glyphosate appears to have put bilateral relations back on track for now. The tripartite committee on glyphosate will meet on July 8. End Summary.

Araujo Strikes a Conciliatory Tone on Glyphosate

¶2. (U) In his first official visit to Ecuador since replacing Maria Araujo as Colombia's foreign minister, Fernando Araujo on May 28 met with Ecuadorian Foreign Minister Maria Espinosa. In a joint press conference following the reportedly cordial session, Araujo stressed the need for continued cross-border cooperation to effectively combat narcotics trafficking and terrorism. Turning to glyphosate, Araujo said that aerial fumigations within 10 kilometers of the Ecuadorian border had been suspended, and that the GOC would redouble manual eradication efforts. He defended Colombia's use of glyphosate, but said that the GOC would be open to compensate border residents if the tripartite committee found scientific evidence to support their claim. Araujo refused to comment on the recent visit by UN Rapporteur for Human Health Rights Paul Hunt, calling it an "Ecuadorian internal matter." (Reftel)

Espinosa Positive on Meeting; Looks Forward

¶3. (U) Espinosa in a May 29 television interview called the meeting with Araujo "frank, open, and useful" in moving forward on issues of interest to Ecuador. She welcomed the GOC's position on fumigations, and said that Araujo assured her that Colombia would submit its findings on the impact of aerial spraying at the July 8 tripartite committee meeting. Espinosa expressed GOC openness to collaborating with Colombia on unspecified Plan Ecuador initiatives, and discussed proposals to deepen cross-border refugee cooperation and Colombian prisoner transfers.

¶4. (C) Minister Coordinator for Internal and External Security Fernando Bustamante in a May 29 meeting with USAID Director and PolOff expressed GOE satisfaction with the Araujo visit. Bustamante welcomed Colombia's offer to cooperate on Plan Ecuador initiatives, which his office coordinates, and stressed the need for the GOC to invest in development projects on the Colombian side of the border.

Comment

¶5. (C) Colombia's unexpected announcement that it would compensate border residents if the tripartite committee found scientific evidence of environmental and health damage helps ease the pressure on bilateral relations from this issue, at least for now. Araujo's first visit to Ecuador, in general, appears to have been very positive here, with good chemistry between the two FMs and positive press highlighting goodwill on both sides.
JEWELL